



PRESS RELEASE

United States Secret Service
Department of Homeland Security

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AGENT WHO LEPT TO PROTECT JACKIE KENNEDY, RECOGNIZED BY HOME STATE *North Dakota honors native son, Clint Hill, with 'Rough Rider' award*

WASHINGTON -- Clint Hill joined the Secret Service as a special agent in 1958 and served under five presidents. But he's probably best known as the agent who leapt on to the rear deck of President Kennedy's limousine in Dallas, Texas, in order to protect then-first Lady Jackie Kennedy after the president was shot. Among modern-day Secret Service agents, Hill is a legend.

Now 86 years old, the North Dakota native has now been recognized as a legend in his home state as well. On Nov. 19, in Washburn, North Dakota, Governor Doug Burgum presented native son Hill with the "Theodore Roosevelt Rough Rider Award."



North Dakota Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem, publicist Lisa McCubbin, Clint Hill, Special Agent in Charge Joe Scargill, N.D. Secretary of State Al Jaeger, N.D. State Historical Society Director Claudia Berg, and N.D. Governor Doug Burgum participated, Nov. 19, 2018, in a ceremony in Washburn, N.D., to present Hill with the "Theodore Roosevelt Rough Rider Award." (Credit: Poppy Mills)

"North Dakota has long welcomed and been home to men and women with the drive to be legendary -- people like the man Clint Hill who we're here to celebrate today," Burgum said of having selected Hill for the award.

Named after that nation's 26th president, the Rough Rider award is given to North Dakota natives who, through excellence in their professional lives, bring credit to their home state. Hill is the 44th North Dakotan to be honored with the award, and the first law enforcement officer as well.

"It's a real honor to be recognized by one's home state," Hill said. "It's one of those things that's very unusual: to be singled out and identified by your home state for what I consider to be an enormous award. I feel that way because I am very fond of North Dakota. It's still my home state insofar as I'm concerned, even if I haven't lived there for years now. It's such an honor to be recognized."



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Special Agent in Charge Joe Scargill of the Minneapolis Field Office traveled to Washburn to participate in the award ceremony. For an audience who might not be familiar with the work of a Secret Service special agent or of the history of Hill, Scargill spelled out some of the challenges of the job that Hill and other agents endure while serving the nation.

"Life on a protective detail with the Secret Service is demanding," Scargill said. "It requires focus, commitment, dedication, and most of all sacrifice. Life on a detail requires being away. It requires being away from home, it requires being away from the warmth and comfort of your loved ones, and it requires disappointing those you love most to accomplish the mission: missing birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries. It requires long hours, working in inclement weather, traversing rough terrain, going days with no sleep, and ultimately being in the line of fire."

Also, he said, being a Secret Service agent requires being prepared to make "the ultimate sacrifice for God and country."

Scargill also touched on the historical tragedy that Hill had been witness to: the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Nov. 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas.

"As the first shot rang out on that tragic day, Special Agent Hill immediately ran into the line of fire with no regard for his own personal safety," Scargill said. "He leapt onto the back of a rapidly moving presidential limo and shielded the president and first lady with his body."

At the time, Scargill noted, agents were not yet issued body armor.



Retired Special Agent Clint Hill was awarded the "Theodore Roosevelt Rough Rider Award," Nov. 19, 2018, in a ceremony in Washburn, N.D. As part of that honor, this portrait of Hill, by Minot-based artist Vern Skaug, will hang in the Theodore Roosevelt Rough Rider Hall of Fame on the ground floor of the state capitol in Bismarck. The painting depicts images of the White House, Hill's military service, his three books about his experiences in the Secret Service, and the iconic image of him leaping onto the back of the presidential limousine to protect the president and first lady on that fateful day in Dallas.



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"Special Agent Hill has made all these tremendous sacrifices," he said. "He's walked through the fire and he stands as tall today as ever. And the impact that Mr. Hill has had on the Secret Service is tremendous; its powerful and timeless."

Having been a special agent for decades, Hill already had firsthand familiarity with what Scargill was saying -- he'd lived it himself. But Scargill also provided comments to Hill directly -- "agent to agent," he said, letting the audience now it was okay to listen in.

"Sir, I've never met you before, but I know you," Scargill told Hill. "I know you not because of your heroism and courage that day (in Dallas, Texas), and not because you have been a personal hero of mine. But because you were worthy of trust and confidence from the day you came on the job and you still are now. Congratulations, sir. We are all impressed by you. You are a legend to me and the rest of the agents on the job. Thank you very much."

ROUGH RIDER STATE

Born in 1932, Hill grew up in Washburn, a city of about 1,300, an hour's drive north of the state's capital. He said back then he was a busy youth who stayed out of trouble.

"Everybody in the town knew me and I knew everybody in the town and all the children were that way. You didn't get into trouble because you knew if you did get into trouble, your parents would find out before your got home," Hill said. "We participated in everything. All the kids did. We were involved in Scouts and our church. In high school, I played football, basketball, ran track, played American Legion junior baseball, sang in the glee club, acted in plays, and played in the high school band. If there was an activity to be done, I was willing to participate."

Hill had plenty to do outdoors as well. He said he hunted, among other things, pheasants, ducks and deer. And in the winter, being that far north, winter sports were popular as well.

"If we weren't indoors, we were outdoors ice skating, playing hockey, or skating long distances. There's a place near Washburn called Painted Woods Creek. I used to skate on that for miles," Hill said. "It was a pleasure to be out in the elements. It could be ten degrees above zero, or down to zero, and you'd still be out there skating away and enjoying life. It's a real tough, rugged place to live. All that gave me a really well-rounded background."



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PUBLIC SERVICE AS A SOLIDER

After high school, Hill left for college in Moorhead, Minnesota. By 1954, he'd earned himself a degree in history and physical education, with a minor in education.

The Korean War had ended less than a year before Hill graduated, and he'd been deferred from the draft -- still on-going -- so that he could attend college. He still owed his country some military service, he said, and after college he went into the Army, where he said he was trained to be an agent in counter intelligence. He spent most of his Army time stationed in Denver, Colorado.

"The training I received to be an agent in counter-intelligence was very thorough, it was a lot of investigative training," Hill said. "We had some of the best instructors in the business at the time. The kind of work I was doing in Denver, we were running a lot of different kinds of investigations."

In September 1955, then President Dwight D. Eisenhower was vacationing in Colorado and suffered a heart attack. Hill said he remembered the president was taken to Fitzsimons Army Hospital, in a nearby suburb of Denver.

"He was the president at that time and had a Secret Service detail with him. Because [Fitzsimons] was an Army facility, and because we were in counter-intelligence for the Army, our paths crossed with those of the Secret Service agents," Hill said. "We got to know some of them, and I was very pleased to find that they were a very efficient group of individuals. They were determined, dedicated, and I wanted, from being around them, I wanted to be like they were. I wanted to be one of them."

Hill was discharged from the Army in 1957. And while the Secret Service didn't hire him immediately as a special agent, by 1958 positions did open up, and Hill was brought on board. He was assigned to the Denver Field Office.

SECRET SERVICE STAR

As a special agent in the Secret Service, Hill said he worked on investigations involving, among other things, forgery of U.S. government financial instruments such as checks and bonds. He also worked on cases involving counterfeiting.

President Eisenhower's wife, Mamie, had family in Colorado. Her mother, Elivera Doud, lived there and Hill said the president was concerned for her well-being.



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"The president had directed that we, the agents in the Secret Service office in Denver, would have an agent in Ms. Doud's house from 7 o'clock at night until 7 o'clock in the morning," Hill said. "She was an elderly lady. She had a full-time nurse. And he was always concerned about her health and well-being. And he didn't want anything to happen to her."

Agents from the Denver Field Office, Hill said, took turns covering the 12-hour shifts at the Doud home to look after the president's mother-in-law. He said during that time, he got to know the Eisenhower family quite well, endearing himself to the family and, apparently, to the president.

"It wasn't too long before I was sent back to the White House for a 30-day evaluation period," he said. "I apparently passed, because a couple months later I was permanently assigned to the White House detail."

As a new agent in the Secret Service, Hill had moved from investigations to the presidential protective detail in less than two years -- something he said is not likely to happen today.

MRS. KENNEDY

In early November 1960, the nation elected Kennedy to be Eisenhower's successor as president of the United States.

At the time, Hill had been assigned to the presidential detail for only a year, and Eisenhower would still serve as president until Kennedy's inauguration only ten weeks later. But the Secret Service moved Hill off presidential protection and assigned him to Jackie Kennedy's protective detail.

"I was one of two agents assigned to Mrs. Kennedy," Hill said.

Just three years later, during a presidential visit to Dallas, President Kennedy was assassinated while riding in a motorcade through the city.

Film of the assassination shows Hill jumping onto the back of the presidential limousine just seconds after the assassination so that he could get closer to the first lady and better protect her.

After the assassination, Hill remained on Mrs. Kennedy's protective detail for a year, until November 1964.



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SECRET SERVICE CHANGES

Four U.S. presidents have been assassinated, including Abraham Lincoln in 1865, James A. Garfield in 1881, William McKinley in 1901, and Kennedy in 1963.

It wasn't until after the assassination of McKinley, in September 1901, however, that the Secret Service was asked to provide protection for the president.

Kennedy's assassination, Hill said, changed things dramatically inside the Secret Service.

"The first thing they did was eliminate the use of open cars," Hill said. "Additional personnel [were hired.] Training was changed, very much so."

Hill said he remembers his own initial training in the Secret Service had been "minimal."

"We had classroom training as agents, with other agents from agencies within the Treasury Department," he said. "We all trained together. And then about a year or so later you would be sent to what was called Secret Service School in Washington, D.C. But most of the things we actually learned the first few years we were in the Secret Service we learned on the job from other agents."

After the Kennedy assassination, he said, training became "much more professional, much more intense. It was like night and day, almost."

TODAY'S AGENTS

Hill retired from the Secret Service in 1975. But he said he still meets with and talks with Secret Service agents who are on the job today.

"The personnel are excellent," he said. "And they have a greater challenge today than we ever had. There's no question. It's much more difficult today than it was back when I was an active agent in the 1950s and 1960s. Some is due to technology or social media. But just probably the attitude of the general population has changed somewhat."

Hill's written three books about his time in the Secret Service, one about working on Mrs. Kennedy's protective detail, one about the events surrounding the Kennedy



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assassination, and another that covers the entire span of his Secret Service career. All three have been on the New York Times best seller list, and all illustrate why joining the Secret Service back in 1958 was for him, at least, a great idea.

"The best decision I had ever made was to come into the Secret Service," he said. "I worked with an enormous group of wonderful people. They were just the very best of the best. I couldn't have asked for a better way of life. I couldn't have asked for better people to work with. It was an honor for me to be accepted into the Secret Service, and I was very fortunate to be in the various places that I was at the times I was there."